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## Woodland Cultures on the Western Prairies: the Rainbow Site Investigations

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## Book Reviews

*Woodland Cultures on the Western Prairies: The Rainbow Site Investigations*, edited by David W. Benn. Report 18. Iowa City: Office of the State Archaeologist, University of Iowa, 1990. xviii, 256 pp. Illustrations, maps, graphs, tables, references. \$12.00 paper.

REVIEWED BY HAROLD HASSEN, ILLINOIS STATE MUSEUM

Understanding human adaptive strategies, past or present, requires a critical examination of how societies respond to opportunities and limitations, especially social and environmental constraints. Variations within an evolving environment present challenges that transcend and link human societies through both time and space. Documenting and interpreting the archeological record are equally challenging to the student of cultural processes.

In *Woodland Cultures on the Western Prairies*, David Benn and his colleagues rise to the challenge. Based on geologic and archeological data, their report on the Rainbow site documents environmental change and illustrates changing human adaptive strategies over several hundred years. Although primarily an interdisciplinary archeological site report, they report their findings through broader regional comparisons. Along with the analytical methods, relating material culture and subsistence remains to environmental reconstruction and ecological constraints, this should provide an impetus to explore a variety of issues within the western prairie peninsula through comparisons with societies that preceded and followed the period for the Rainbow site occupations. The volume successfully illustrates that whether researchers seek to understand frontier life on the prairie or long-term changes among indigenous populations, it is important to examine how the environment affects human adaptive strategies.

This study represents an edited and expanded revision of the original archeological report on the Rainbow site prepared by Luther College in 1981. The Rainbow site, located in Plymouth County in western Iowa, contains several short-term occupations dating between A.D. 195 and A.D. 683, a scantily documented period of change that encompasses the transition between the Woodland and Villager traditions. The site provides a unique opportunity to examine

and compare not just consecutive components but also occupations within components.

In chapter one David Benn introduces the project, summarizes previous work, establishes the regional cultural context, and outlines the research objectives that are discussed in detail throughout the book. The topics include reconstruction of the geological, ecological, and climatic context; artifact classification; site formation processes; identification of the subsistence base; reconstruction of the Woodland social order; and description and explanation of the process of culture change within the Woodland-Villager transition.

In chapter two Arthur Bettis documents how the dynamics of an evolving stream contributed to the burial and preservation of the Rainbow site. His discussion of the regional and site-specific geology is concise, well illustrated, and easy to follow even for those uninitiated in comprehensive geological investigations. The social context and spatial structure of the site is examined by Benn in chapter three, where he identifies activities through patterns of artifact use and discard.

In chapters four (Benn), five (David Hovde), and six (Benn), the authors describe and analyze stone tools, bone tools, and pottery. They document temporal differences in types of raw material used to manufacture tools as well as the functional diversity of the tools. The analysis of pottery includes a comprehensive discussion of changes and variations in regional pottery, attributing changes in pottery to changes in Woodland subsistence strategies. Variations in decorative styles and manufacturing techniques were also related to expressions of individual prestige and group solidarity.

Chapters seven through ten focus on varying aspects of subsistence remains, including vertebrates, mussels, gastropods, and flora. Little prior information existed for this period (A.D. 100-650), which enhances the value of the data presented here. The results indicate that the occupants of the Rainbow site exploited a diverse environment, including stream, riparian, forest/forest margin, and grassland communities. In some instances the differences in species composition provide proxy evidence for the geomorphic and hydrologic changes previously documented.

In chapter eleven Benn concludes the report with a stimulating discussion of the development of the Woodland productive system. One need not adhere to Benn's Marxist approach to appreciate his attempt to explain the cultural and social relationships among the material evidence recovered from the Rainbow and MAD sites. Focusing on the mode of production and its varying components, Benn presents a comprehensive economic interpretation of change spanning

one thousand years of prehistory that is certainly relevant to analyses of Euro-American settlement on the western prairie.

This book's interdisciplinary approach and stimulating discussions of human adaptive strategies that occurred more than one thousand years ago should appeal to both prehistorians and historians who seek to understand the process of cultural and social change.

*John Charles Frémont: Character as Destiny*, by Andrew Rolle. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991. xvi, 351 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY ROGER L. NICHOLS, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

For readers of American frontier and western history, the name John Charles Frémont brings many pictures to mind: soldier, explorer, western publicist, Mexican War troublemaker, presidential candidate, mining entrepreneur, and Civil War general to mention just the most obvious. In this new biography, Andrew Rolle attempts to describe the famous pathfinder's activities as part of national expansion and development. Of perhaps even more importance, the author suggests at least a tentative thesis that he claims helps to explain Frémont's often unclear and even bizarre actions. He depicts Frémont as living out a need to deal with his abandonment by a missing father—a man he never met. Thus, Rolle posits his subject's continuing need to seek out strong, older men who might serve as stand-ins for his father. Not only does he seek to portray Frémont as needing strong male figures, at least at the fringes of his life, but he claims that the pathfinder also felt a need to rebel against direction and domination by these individuals. In effect, the author depicts his biographee's life as a series of personal relationships, usually gone wrong. Somehow, throughout his career, Frémont managed to attract favorable attention and to acquire a reputation as a dashing, national hero. This telling of his life story hardly supports such a view: a publicity hound—yes—but rarely, if ever, was he a man of either heroic thoughts or actions.

Rolle does add to an understanding of Frémont's heritage by proving beyond any reasonable doubt that the explorer's father was not a French emigré. Rather he was a French Canadian named Louis René Frémont, born in Quebec. After drifting to the French West Indies, he arrived in Virginia shortly before the War of 1812. There he ran off with Mrs. Anne Pryor. That act cost him his social standing as well as his livelihood as a teacher of French and fencing. He lived with Anne until 1818, when he died. During their frontier wanderings, Anne and Louis Frémont had four children of whom John Charles

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